



The Insider

www.senate.mi.gov/switalski

Inside State Politics with State Senator Mickey Switalski Senate District 10

April 29, 2005

Welcome to the electronic version of *The Insider*. I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for your support and giving me an opportunity to represent you in the Michigan Senate. It is my sincere hope that this bi-weekly e-newsletter will keep you informed of the happenings in Lansing while staying true to the traditional style of *The Insider*. If you would like to contact me, please feel free to e-mail me at senmswitalski@senate.michigan.gov or call me at my Roseville or Lansing office. You can also meet me in person during my constituent hours, coming to a library near you. Call my office and make an appointment or just walk in. See schedule for details.

Mickey's Letter Bag: Steroids in Schools

In the last issue of the *Insider E-Newsletter*, I asked for your opinions on legislation in the Michigan House that would combat the use of steroids among high school athletes. The bills (House Bills 4118, 4594, 4595, 4596) passed the Michigan House on April 28 and will head to the Michigan Senate for further consideration.

House Bill 4118 would require school boards to implement a policy that states that the use of performance-enhancing substances such as steroids would affect a student's ability to participate in athletics. In addition, the bill would also require the Department of Community Health to create and update a list of banned substances consistent with what the National Collegiate Athletic Association bans.

Meanwhile, House Bills 4594 and 4595 would prohibit the possession of steroids within 1000 feet of drug free zones at parks and schools and House Bill 4596 would establish criminal sentencing guidelines for violators.

I appreciated hearing your thoughts on this very important issue and here are some of your letters on the topic:

Dear Senator:

Unless schools are given the money for steroid testing, any legislation is worthless. And if you are going to ban something, you'd better have a means to determine if the ban is being adhered to. Until the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) makes steroids an illegal substance, you'd best leave the situation alone.

Susan Westlake
Clinton Township

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Dear Sen. Switalski:

This email is regarding the regulation of the use of steroids in public schools. I believe that this isn't an easy subject at all. And, as a former student athlete in a public school, these issues do have a special place in my heart.

However, I believe that the sight of this legislature falls short. Steroid use may be a problem, but I think there is a greater problem that CAUSES steroid use. It is the same problem that caused the wrestlers in my school to starve themselves to make weight (we had a joke at my school, we know it was wrestling season when the wrestlers were dropping like flies). It's the same reason why there was a line outside our school trainer's office, a line of students who needed their knees, wrists, ankles, etc. wrapped, because they were permanently damaged and weren't even 18 years old (I was one of those). There is just too much pressure on student athletes to perform, to do their best. The issue isn't that simple, though. Where does this pressure come from? It comes from everywhere, coaches, parents, and the students themselves, just wanting to do the best job they could and in some cases hoping that it will get them some money for skyrocketing college costs. Is the legislature going to make a law that says, "don't push yourself, don't let others push you"? The best one can do is put money and time into awareness campaigns. In other words, if it wasn't steroids, it would be something else. Steroids are a piece of a greater whole, and if you really want to combat the problem, you need to look at it more holistically.

I hope that this gives some insight into student athletes. Thank you again for looking to your constituents for insights.

Sincerely,
Tracy Kerchkof
Roseville

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Dear Senator Switalski,

As a high school teacher I find it somewhat amusing that the legislature is even considering requiring random drug testing of student athletes. Who would be picking up the tab for all these tests? Are these the same lawmakers who haven't increased per pupil spending over the past three years? Have failed to follow through on the MEAP scholarship money that they promised kids? Allowed tuition rates to skyrocket at our state universities and colleges?

I think the answer here is quite simple. Most of the students I know that are trying to get scholarships to play a sport at the college level want the scholarship because it's their only way to be able to afford to go to college. If the legislature truly wants to see steroid use decline, then increase educational spending and cap tuition rates so that students won't have to rely on steroids as their only way to get to college.

Sincerely,

Tim Poterek
Clinton Township.

Mickey's Blog: Fighting Steroid Abuse in High School Athletics

I watched the congressional hearings about steroid use in baseball with feelings of betrayal and disappointment. I believe the use of steroids to enhance performance in sports is cheating, and should not be tolerated. It is unhealthy, and destroys the fairness of competition. The Olympics and professional sports like soccer have enacted strict rules including random testing to enforce their policies. I applaud those efforts. Unfortunately, professional sports in this country have a poor record on policing themselves in this area.

Our state government has a responsibility to police this when others fail in their duties. We especially have to act to maintain the health of minors, to maintain the integrity of school sports competition, and to send a general message to our society.

The House passed a series of bills to begin addressing our responsibility. They require schools to adopt a policy, but don't contain any testing. This is a good beginning, but I believe we should go further.

Testing is a difficult and costly undertaking. I would guess that few parents would want their child tested. But I can imagine everyone would want others tested if it appeared they were gaining an unfair competitive advantage by using performance enhancing drugs.

As Tracy's letter points out so well, the problem isn't just steroids. And as the phrase, "performance enhancing drugs" also shows, steroids aren't the only drugs which should be regulated. How to accurately test and avoid false positives, and maintain privacy rights make this a complex legislative balancing act.

But it is one I don't think we should shy away from.

There is also the question of how to pay for testing. Testing everyone is prohibitively expensive, but a random program could have the same deterrent effect. A testing program could be financed by a surcharge on state tournament ticket revenues. All these questions deserve a hearing. Ignoring the problem and doing nothing would be wrong.

Finally, we should reflect on what we prize in athletic competition. Is bigger, faster, and stronger always better? Or do skill and agility get overpowered in modern games by brute force? Don't we as a society have the power to shape that? What do we truly value? I am reminded of the motto of the Royal Troon Golf Club in Scotland, a British Open Course. *Tam Arte quam Marte*. As much by skill as by strength. Maybe we need to strike a new balance.

What do you think? Changes to the Michigan Merit Award

On April 27, I held a press conference with Governor Jennifer Granholm to announce legislation that would revamp the way the Michigan Merit Award Scholarships is given out to students.

The legislation (Senate Bill 442) calls for awarding the Michigan Merit Award Scholarships to students who successfully complete two years of college as opposed to the current arrangement where the scholarships are awarded prior to the start of college.

Under the bill, students would be eligible to receive up to \$4,000 of scholarships from state and federal resources. Students would be required to apply for federal financial aid by filling out the FAFSA form.

To qualify, students must either earn an associate's degree at a Michigan community college, achieve junior status at a four-year higher education institution in Michigan, or complete an equivalent technical or career training program. In addition, a high school student must still complete the current requirements of meeting 40 hours of community service in high school, take the high school assessment test (which is currently the MEAP test) and receive a high school diploma or G.E.D.

If the legislation is approved by the Michigan Legislature, the high school graduating class of 2007 would be the first class to qualify.

The legislation stems from one of the recommendations of the Cherry Commission on Higher Education and Economic Growth, which was tasked with identifying ways to double the number of college graduates in Michigan over the next decade. The report called raising the expected minimum educational standard to include receiving a college degree.

Let me know what you think about the proposed changes and I will publish some of your letters in the next issue of the Insider E-Newsletter.

Peace of Mind Books Available

Regardless of your personal feelings about the way the Terry Schiavo situation was handled, one thing that can be learned from this episode is the importance of making a will and clearly designating what kind of medical care one would want if they are incapable of making their own decisions. I have Peace of Mind books available in my office which includes a Living Will, Durable Power of Attorney, and Advanced Medical Directive forms. These forms are not advisory and are legal documents. I encourage you to fill one out. If you would like to receive a Peace of Mind book, please email me with your name and mailing address.

Mickey's TV Insider Show

Check out my TV Insider Show coming to a television station near you. Watch me interview local guests about politics, life, issues and concerns to our district.

Sterling Heights

Every Saturday and Sunday at 12:30 p.m.
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Utica

Every Wednesday at 9 a.m.
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Clinton Township

Last week of every month- Sat thru Thurs
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Roseville

Various Times
(Comcast Channel 18)

*Please note that Sterling Heights/Utica/Clinton Township will show the TV Insider Show on Comcast Channel 5 and Wide Open West Channel 10. Clinton Township will air the TV Insider Show at various times during the last week of every month. Roseville can see the TV Insider Show on Comcast Channel 18.

Coffee Hours

*Please note that since the District Office is in Roseville, I do not have set coffee hours in Roseville. However, I encourage you to visit the Roseville office. We even have a coffee pot. Everyone is welcome to attend the coffee hours and discuss their issues and concerns.

May 2, June 6 7-9 p.m. Location: Sterling Heights Public Library (40255 Dodge Park) Sterling Heights	May 23 7-9 p.m. Location: Clinton-Macomb Public Library (40900 Romeo Plank Drive) Clinton Township
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